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Goldwater Institute pans sales tax for transportation, promotes toll roads instead

Phoenix Business Journal - by [Jan Buchholz](#) Phoenix Business Journal

The **Goldwater Institute** says toll roads are the best solution to Arizona's increased traffic congestion.

"More Roads to Travel: A Path to Transportation Solutions in Arizona," is the title of a policy report released by the think tank on Wednesday. The study suggests that privatized toll roads are the fastest, most economic way to solve traffic problems.

"Arizona should actively pursue a toll road policy, which would make it possible to build needed roads now rather than decades from now," Byron Schlomach, an economist for the institute, said in the report.

The institute also recommended assessing tolls and fees on drivers who use certain roads at peak drive times. According to the report, about half of the drivers using freeways during rush hour are not commuting to and from work, and thus should be assessed extra fees. Truckers also would have to drive during off-peak hours or be assessed an added fee, based on the report's recommendations.

Mass transit and expanded light rail are not recommended in the report, which says the "\$898 million worth of contracts to build the Phoenix light rail system is enough money to build 19 miles of four-lane highway."

Arizonans, Schlomach said, simply aren't interested in mass transit.

"By how they've chosen to spend their money, Arizonans have shown how much they value the flexibility cars provide. Transportation solutions need to embrace that reality," he said.

He also cites the Valley's sprawling growth as a reason to minimize public transit options.

"Phoenix's low population density makes continued emphasis on mass transit befuddling," Schlomach said.

Other recommendations in the report include amending the state Constitution to allow the Arizona State Land Department to give land to the **Arizona Department of Transportation** for roads. Under current provisions, ADOT must buy the land and those

proceeds are then transferred to the state school fund. The report suggests increasing the use of small vans and flexible scheduling for transit rather than extending bus routes and light rail. It also recommends creating more one-way streets, building grade separations at select intersections, employing more sophisticated traffic signal synchronization and restricting truck traffic.

Schlomach estimated the cost of congestion caused by commercial trucks from pollution, wasted gas and grid lock, as a result of driving across the state is about \$8 billion annually.

According to Katie Nutter, director of communications for the Goldwater Institute, the trucking industry "doesn't like the idea of toll roads. They don't want to pay to use the roads. And, indeed, many trucks don't pay at all to use Arizona highways, because it is quite possible to drive through the state from California to the East without refueling and paying Arizona fuel taxes."

One solution the Goldwater Institute strongly opposes is an increase of taxes, particularly a one cent increase on the state sale's tax, as recommended by a coalition of business interests. The Transportation and Infrastructure Moving AZ's Economy, or TIME, is promoting the increased sales tax to fund roads and transit.

"Arizona needs more roads, but the last thing our economy needs is more taxes," Scholmach said. "Current transportation plans need to be scrubbed of inefficient projects and greater emphasis needs to be placed on private sources of transportation funds."

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